



ography

view..... we've seen it before and, if you've got a reasonable w, you can do it yourself very easily. Of course, those 'Yearbook' you may as well have them taken in an automatic photo-booth e are some tips that will help make your photographic portraits nd be a little more personal, showing your style.... which you These will concentrate on the ability to take fresh and interesting pictures with the minimum of extra equipment.

Let's look at some ways to break out of the mould and take **striking portraits** by breaking (or at least bending) the rules and adding a little randomness into your **portrait photography**.

1. Alter Your Perspective

Most portraits are taken with the camera at (or around) the eye level of the subject. While this is good common sense - completely changing the angle that you shoot from can give your portrait a real WOW factor.



Get up high and shoot down on your subject or get as close to the ground as you can and shoot up. Either way you'll be seeing your subject from an angle that is bound to create interest.



2. Play with Eye Contact

It is amazing how much the direction of your subject's eyes can impact an image. Most portraits have the subject looking down the lens - something that can create a real sense of connection between a subject and those viewing the image. But there are a couple of other things to try:

A. Looking off camera - have your subject focus their attention on something unseen and outside the field of view of your camera. This can create a feeling of candidness and also create a little intrigue and interest as the viewer of the shot wonders what they are looking at. This intrigue is particularly drawn about when the subject is showing some kind of emotion (ie 'what's making them laugh?' or 'what is making them look surprised?'). Just be aware that when you have a subject looking out of frame that you can also draw the eye of the viewer of the shot to the edge of the image also - taking them away from the point of interest in your shot - the subject.



B. Looking within the frame - alternatively you could have your subject looking at something (or someone) within the frame. A child looking at a ball, a woman looking at her new baby, a man looking hungrily at a big plate of pasta.... When you give your subject something to look at that is inside the frame you create a second point of interest and a relationship between it and your primary subject. It also helps create 'story' within the image.



3. Break the Rules of Composition

There are a lot of 'rules' out there when it comes to composition and they can definitely 'save the day' at times, when another idea hasn't worked. But I've always had a love-hate relationship with them. While they are useful to know and employ that they are also useful to know so you can purposely break them - as this can lead to eye catching results.

The "Rule of Thirds" is one that can be effective to break - placing your subject dead centre can sometimes create a powerful image - or even creative placement with your subject right on the edge of a shot can sometimes create interesting images.



Another 'rule' that we often talk about in portrait photography is to 'give your subject something to look into'. This can work really well - but again, sometimes rules are made to be broken.



4. Experiment with Lighting

Another element of randomness that you can introduce to your portraits is the way that you light them. There are almost unlimited possibilities when it comes to using light in portraits.

Side-lighting can create mood, backlighting and silhouetting your subject to hide their features can be powerful. These do not need to be created using a fancy flash set-up. The most important piece of lighting equipment - perhaps more than a lamp itself - is a reflector - which can be as cheap and simple as a white card (like Bristol board), using natural lighting from a window and bouncing it to the shady side of your subject.





5. Move Your Subject Out of their Comfort Zone

I was chatting with a photographer recently who told me about a corporate portrait shoot that he had done with a business man at his home. They'd taken a lot of head and shoulder shots, shots at his desk, shots in front of framed degrees and other 'corporate' type images. They had all turned out fairly standard - but there was nothing that really stood out from the crowd.

The photographer and the subject agreed that there were plenty of useable shots but they wanted to create something 'special' and out of the box. The photographer suggested they try some 'jumping' shots. The subject was a little hesitant at first but stepped out into the uncomfortable zone and dressed in his suit and tie started jumping!

The shots were amazing, surprising and quite funny. The shoot culminated with the subject jumping in his pool for one last image!

While this might all sound a little 'silly' the shots ended up being featured in a magazine spread about the subject. It was the series of out of the box images that convinced the magazine he was someone that they'd want to feature.



Image

by [TeeRish](#)

6. Shoot Candidly

Sometimes posed shots can look.... posed. Some people don't look good in a posed environment and so switching to a candid type approach can work.

Photograph your subject at work, with family or doing something that they love. This will put them more at ease and you can end up getting some special shots with them reacting naturally to the situation that they are in. Maybe a wider angle lens may allow you to include the subject's environment (his/her 'habitat'), or you might want to grab a longer zoom lens to take you out of their immediate zone and get really paparazzi with them, shooting from slightly further away than normal.

This can particularly work when photographing children.



7. Introduce a Prop

Add a prop of some kind into your shots and you create another point of interest that can enhance your shot.

Yes you might run the risk of taking too much focus away from your main subject but you could also really add a sense of story and place to the image that takes it in a new direction and gives the person you're photographing an extra layer of depth that they wouldn't have had without the prop.



8. Focus Upon One Body Part - Get Close Up

Get a lens with a long focal length attached to your camera - or get right in close so that you can just photograph a part of your subject. Photographing a person's hands, eyes, mouth or even just their lower body... can leave a lot to the imagination of the viewer of an image.

Sometimes it's what is left out of an image that says more than what is included.



9. Obscure Part of your Subject

A variation on the idea of zooming in on one part of the body is to obscure parts of your portrait subject's face or body. You can do this with clothing, objects, their hands or just by framing part of them out of the image.

Doing this means that you leave a little to the imagination of the image's viewer but also focus their attention on parts of your subject that you want them to be focused upon.



10. Take a Series of Shots

Switch your camera into 'burst' or 'continuous shooting' mode and fire off more than one shot at a time.

In doing this you create a series of images that could be presented together instead of just one static image.

This technique can work very well when you're photographing children - or really any active subject that is changing their position or pose in quick succession.



11. Frame Your Subject

Framing is a technique where by you draw attention to one element of an image by framing it with another element of the image.



Framing gives an image depth and draws the eye to a point of interest in the image.

You could do it by placing your subject in a window or doorway, have them look through a small gap or even use their hands around their face.

12. Go with a Wide Angle

Shooting with a wide angle lens attached to your camera can help create some memorable shots when you're doing portrait photography.

At very wide focal lengths you can create some wonderful distortion. It might not be the type of shot you take of your wife or girlfriend (unless she's in a playful mood) but using these focal lengths will enlarge parts of the face or body that are on the edge of the frame more than what is in the centre.

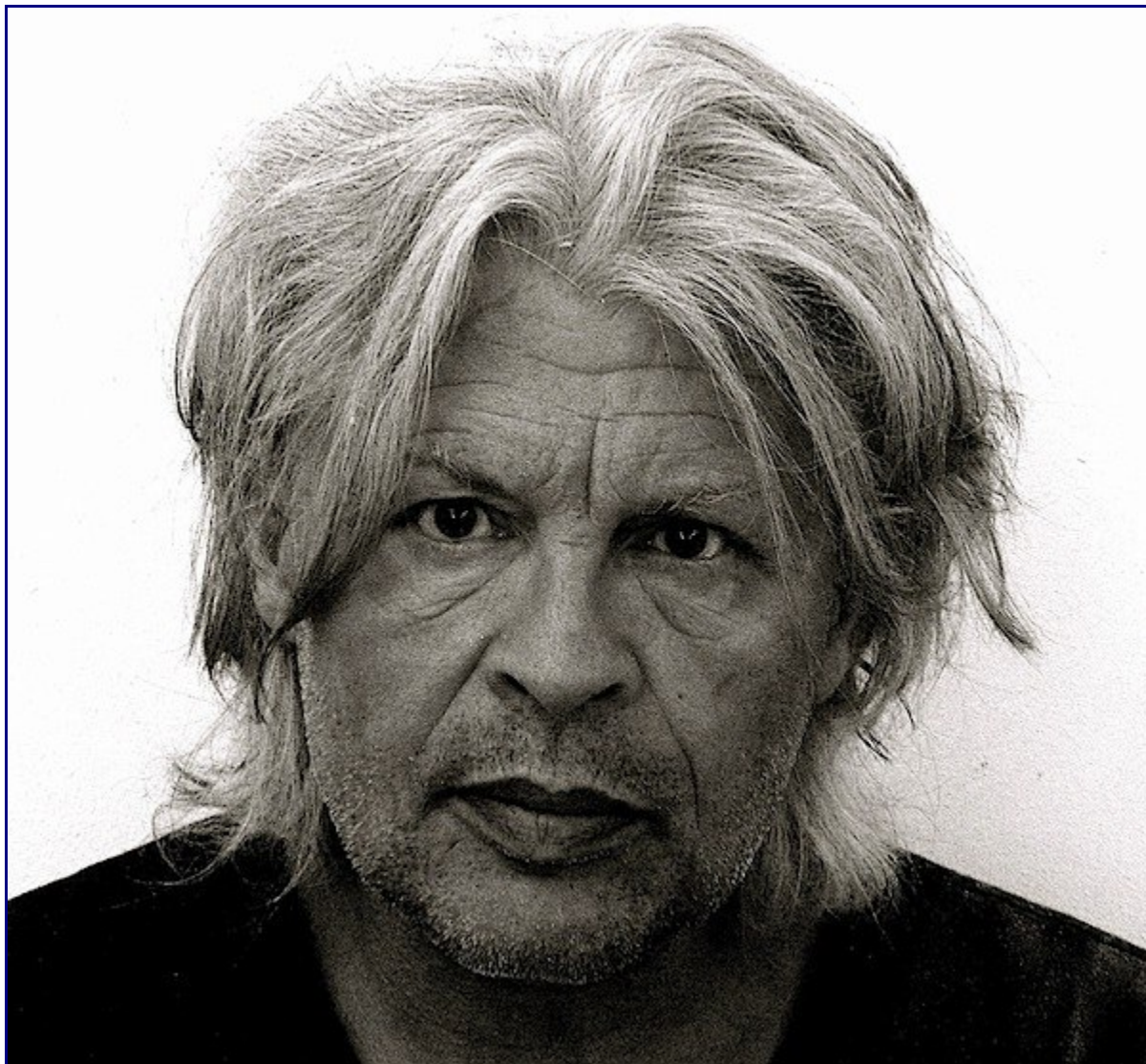
It can also give a wide open and dramatic impact when your subject is in an impressive setting.



13. Play With Backgrounds

The person in your portrait is the main point of interest - however sometimes when you place them into different contexts with different backgrounds you can dramatically alter the mood in a shot.

Sometimes you want your background to be as minimalistic as possible.



While at other times a dramatic or colourful background can help your subject really stand out.



The key is to experiment.

14. Change the Format Framing

Many photographers get stuck in a rut of only ever shooting either in 'landscape' (when the camera is held horizontally) or 'portrait' (when the camera is held vertically) modes. Look back through your images and see which one you use predominantly.

Just because a vertical framing is called 'portrait' mode doesn't mean you always need to use it when shooting portraits. Mix your framing up in each shoot that you do and you'll add variety to the type of shots you take.



15. Hold Your Camera on an Angle

Horizontal and Vertical framings are not the only options when it comes to shooting portraits. While getting your image straight can be important in when shooting in these formats, holding your camera on a more diagonal angle can also inject a little fun into your images.

This type of framing can add a sense of fun and energy into your shots. Just don't 'slightly' do it or people will be wondering if you might have made a mistake



16. Take Unfocused Shots

As photographers we have 'sharp focus' drummed into us as an ultimate objective to achieve in our work - but sometimes lack of focus can create shots with real emotion, mood and interest.

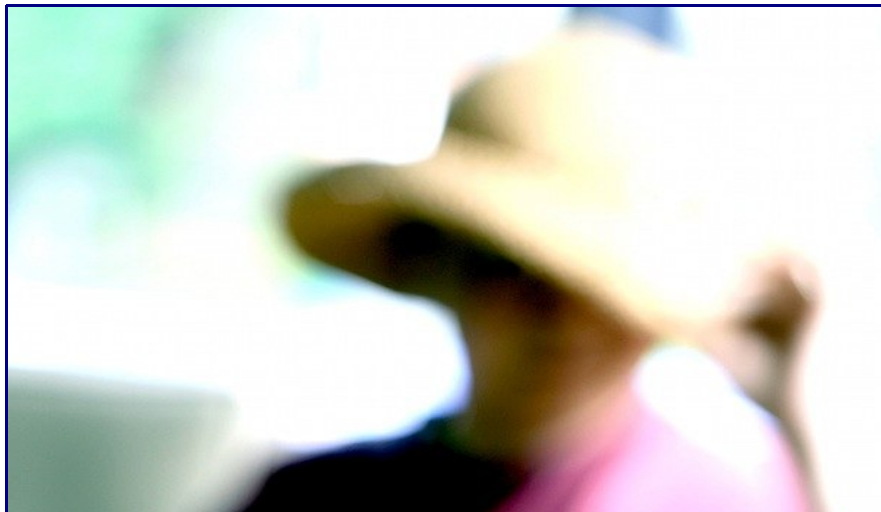
There are two main strategies for taking unfocused images that work:

1. Focus upon one element of the image and leave your main subject blurred. To do this use a large aperture which will create a narrow depth of field and focus upon something in front of or behind your subject.



2. Leave the full image out of focus. To do this again choose a wide aperture but focus well in front or behind anything that is in your image (you'll need to switch to manual focusing to achieve this).

These kinds of shots can be incredibly dreamy and mysterious.



17. Introduce Movement

Portraits can be so static - but what if you added some movement into them? This can be achieved in a few ways:



- by making your subject move
- by keeping your subject still but having an element in the scene around them move
- by moving your camera (or its lens to achieve a zoom burst)



The key with the above three methods is to use a slow enough shutter speed to capture the movement.

The alternative is to have your subject obviously move fast but to use a shutter speed so fast that it 'freezes' their movement.

18. Experiment with Subject Expressions

In some portraits it is the expression on the face of your subject that makes the image.

Get your subject to experiment with different moods and emotions in your image. Play with extreme emotions



But also try more sombre or serious type shots



Photo by

[Stuck in Customs](#)

19. Fill the Frame

One way to ensure that your subject captures the attention of the viewer of your portrait is to fill the frame with their face.

It's not something that you'd do in every shot that you take - but if your subject is the only feature in the shot - there's really nowhere else to look.



20. Find an Interesting Subject

Some photographers regularly go out on the streets looking for interesting people to photograph.

When they find someone interesting the photographer approaches them, asks if they'd pose for him, quickly finds a suitable background and then shoots off a handful of shots quickly (if they give him permission of course).

The result is that he has the most wonderful collection of photographs of people of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds.

While many of us spend most of our time photographing our loved ones - perhaps it'd be an interesting exercise to shoot interesting strangers once in a while?

Some suggestions when photographing strangers....

- 1. Always ask for permission if the person will be the main subject of your photo**
- 2. If a person is a minor subject in a larger photo don't seek permission** - it's just not logistically possible to ask everyone on a street if you can photograph them!
- 3. Getting 'permission' can mean different things in different situations** - often it's simply a matter of holding up your camera and smiling with a raised eyebrow. Other times you might actually ask but gesturing will usually be sufficient enough to get a nod or a shake of the head. Most photographers, once they've tried this, find that it's quite rare to get knocked back from a friendly approach.
- 4. If permission is not given or you sense the other person is not comfortable with your actions** - stop and politely move on. In some cultures people say yes just to be polite but don't really want you to take their shot. If you're getting these vibes stop immediately.
- 5. Before you travel do some research on what is and isn't acceptable culturally** - last time I travelled (Caribbean, 2011) I was amazed to see how many people in the tour group I was with had no clues about the culture they were visiting. As a result they often appeared to the locals as being brash and showy (well, most of them were from New York). While this isn't directly related to taking photos it does have an impact upon those you meet along the way that you might wish to photograph.
- 6. Smiling at the person and maintaining strong eye contact before, during and after taking your photo does wonders** - for starters it helps with getting permission, then it helps them relax and lastly it shows your appreciation and that you value the person. Show a genuine interest in the other person, their life and what they're doing and you'll not only get a great shot but you'll leave a positive feeling with the person - you might even learn a thing or two and make a new friend. This may, of course, entail showing them your shot on the camera's LCD.
- 7. If you're watching a performance or show** where photography is expressly allowed don't ask permission of individuals - they're doing it for some sort of payment and are used to it.
- 8. If photographing children** take extra care to get permission from a parent where there is one present. Photographers need to be particularly careful in this area.
- 9. Don't pay or tip people for photographs** - I know many photographers do this but it's something to be avoided. Some people travel with little gifts from home (toys, pens,

badges etc) which they like to give to people they meet along the way but don't use these as 'payments' or bribes as such. Similarly, dress down if you're in a poor area - your camera alone may be worth the equivalent of several months' wages to the locals. Just try to keep a low profile.

10. Don't travel in a large group - One of the keys to getting good street photos of people is to travel in small groups or (when it's safe to do so) alone. There's something about a large group, all carrying cameras, coming up to a person that is very overwhelming. If travelling with a larger group, hang back on the edges of the group and look for your own opportunities.

Keep in mind what you'd feel like if a stranger walked up to you in your neighbourhood and asked for a photograph and act in a way that you'd want to be treated in that kind of situation.

Meanwhile, back in the studio, all you need is a source of lighting and a reflector of some kind. A tripod is very useful, but you don't need flash (on camera or studio). And don't expect to take perfect portraits in the first half an hour with your model. Just relax and have fun. I'll take a look at the technicalities of portrait photography in another article soon.